

FIRST
COMICS
**LIMITED
SERIES**
NO. 3 of 3

THE P.I.'S

MAY \$1.25
NO. 3
\$1.60 CANADA

MICHAEL MAUSER and **MS. TREE**

**plus! MIKE GRELL'S
TRIBUTE TO
MICKEY SPILLANE!**



PRIVATE LETTERS

C/O FIRST COMICS
1014 DAVIS ST.
EVANSTON, IL 60201



Here we are — the third and final issue of First Comics' first limited series, **The P.I.'s**, and we're still filling this letters page with editorial comment rather than your letters. They tell me this has something to do with publishing schedules and the like, but I don't pretend to understand how that works. All I know is I've been asked to write this page, and not being one to ever turn down the opportunity to pontificate, I've accepted the challenge (and if you can think of another case in which the editorial page of a comic has been turned over to the *inker* of the book, please let me know, and I won't consider this so unusual). First would still like to know your thoughts on this series, so please feel free to write to the address above — or if you want to send your comments to the *Ms. Tree* letters page, you can write us at P.O. Box 1007, Muscatine, IA 52761.

In 1973, Charlton Comics published the first issue of the original series of **E-Man** comics by **Nicola Cuti** and **Joe Staton**.

A scruffy and not-quite-as-short-as-he-is-now detective named Michael Mauser showed up in the third Charlton issue of **E-Man**. Mauser got his own slot as the back-up feature in another Charlton title called *Vengeance Squad*, and comic book prices went up to twenty-five cents. Being a fan of detective and crime tales, I collected *Vengeance Squad* as avidly as I did **E-Man** — and being a fledgling cartoonist, I found myself greatly influenced by Joe's drawing style. There was a sense of humor and a sense of fun in Joe's work that I found lacking in the work of many of the oh-so-serious comic book illustrators who became fan favorites in the 1970s ... a sense of fun not unlike that found in Jack Cole's *Plastic Man*, Ramona Fradon's *Metamorpho*, Simon and Kirby's *Fighting American* and the work of such cartoonists as Al Capp, Ray Gotto and Jack Davis. An issue of **E-Man** always promised the reader a good time — that is, until it was cancelled. The Charlton versions of **E-Man** and Mauser went away, and Joe went on to draw other characters for other companies (including a stint on the aforementioned *Plastic Man* for DC).

I was sorry these two comic book creations were gone, but I managed to get on with my life anyway, and I managed to find plenty to do in the ensuing years — things like graduating from high school, working in radio, working with a rock & roll band — and

teaming up with **Max Collins** to create our own comic book detective, *Ms. Tree*.

Meanwhile, **Max Collins** had enlisted the aid of one **Mike Gold** to help with the promotion of the 50th anniversary of *Dick Tracy* (which Max writes) and the research for Max's Chicago-based historical mystery novel *True Detective*. Now it seems Mike was involved with this new comic book company that was starting up ... and it all turned out to be First Comics.

We were busy filling the four-color pages of *Ms. Tree's Thrilling Detective Adventures* for Eclipse, but were still anxious to do a little work for First. So we did. One page.

Do you remember those spoofs of junk food ads that ran in the early First issues of **E-Man**? Our "Minute Mist-ery" detective, **Mike Mist**, solved the case of the bitter almond-flavored "Winkies" snack cakes in First's **E-Man** #2. In fact, because our first issue of *Ms. Tree's Thrilling Watchamacallums* was published late, the **Mike Mist** in **E-Man** #2 became my first published professional four-color comics work (the previous *Ms. Tree* stories having been in black and white). There's something about those second issues of **E-Man** that makes them both special (to me, at least).

But that wasn't enough. We wanted to do more work for First. We wanted to team up Mauser and *Ms. Tree*. Max talked to Mike. I talked to Joe. I talked to Max. Mike talked to Joe. Mike talked to me. Joe talked to Max. We talked over the phone. We talked at conventions. We talked at parties at Mike's place (what a wild life we comic book people lead!) and we talked and talked and talked and finally we did something. We called it **The P.I.'s** and you're holding it in your hands right now.

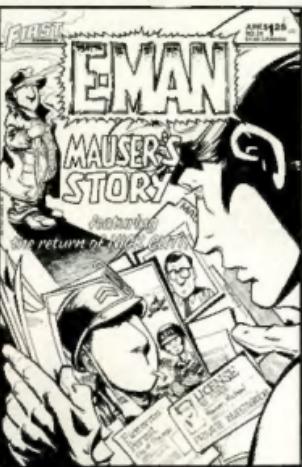
In the meantime, Max and I took advantage of the fact that we own *Ms. Tree* lock, stock and barrel, to leave Eclipse and move to our new publishers, Aardvark-Vanaheim (the folks who bring you *Cerebus*). This left **Jon Sable** creator **Mike Grell**, without a place to do those Mickey Spillane pin-ups he was doing in our book at Eclipse, so he talked to Mike (Grell talked to Gold, that is) and signed up for this three issue run. And we've all had a heck of a good time.

Although I've been drawing *Ms. Tree* for several years now (with the more-than-capable assistance of **Gary Kato**), **The P.I.'s** was my first honest-to-goodness *inking* assignment. It certainly was a much different experience than inking my own work, and I feel I learned a lot in the process (compare my inking on

this issue with issue #1 and I think you'll see the difference).

Will **The P.I.'s** ever work together again? Will *Ms. Tree* ever meet any other First characters? Well, we have been talking ... and as you all know, anything can happen in the comic books.

In the meantime, *Ms. Tree* continues to solve mysteries on her own in her monthly series from A-V, and Michael Mauser makes his home in First's **E-Man**.



And now things seem to have come full circle, as **Nicola Cuti** returns to the feature he co-created with Joe, in **E-Man** #24, to tell you everything you never knew about the origins of Mike "don't call me Mickey" Mauser. It promises to be a good time.

— Terry Beatty

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A FIRST COMICS
PUBLISHING PRODUCTION

THE P.I.s™

FOUR COLOR CRIME

conclusion: **YOU WILL BELIEVE
A MAN CAN DIE!**

My name's Mika Mauser—
and the guy with the long
fingernails might as well be
Howard Hughes, for all I
know...

All I know for sure is, I
was stakin' out the
apartment of an out-on-
ball thief, one Sal Lumpino,
a.k.a. Sally the Lump—
waitin' to be relieved by my
"fellow" P.I., Ms. Michael
Tree, when Darth Vader
here goes rushin' in—

MAX COLLINS
writer

JOE STATON
penciller

TERRY BEATTY
inker

KEN BRUZENAK
letterer

WENDY FIORE
colorist

RICK OLIVER
editor



ms. TREE™
created by
**MAX COLLINS &
TERRY BEATTY**

**model
MAUSER™**
private eye
created by
**NICOLA CUTI &
JOE STATON**



If course I never
was one to take my
own advice-

YOU
LITTLE
FOOL...







A

ANOTHER DAY DAWNS IN
THE WINDY CITY, AND
MICHAEL MAUSER FINDS
HIMSELF AT HIS HOME
AWAY FROM HOME...



This was my third visit to the Freeman home—my third attempt to talk to **Billy**, the comic-collecting nephew of the Kirbys.



Billy was a gifted young cartoonist—I'd seen that much on my previous visit.



MAUSER, THIS IS OUR SKETCH ARTIST. IT JUST DESCRIBE THAT APPARITION YOU SAW IN SALLY THE LUMP'S PAD—

...AND I'LL DO MY BEST TO TURN IT INTO AN IMAGE...













THE COMIC BOOK COMPANIES REVIEW THE WORK OF ASPIRING CARTOONISTS AT THESE CONVENTIONS... BILLY WAS PREPARING SAMPLES, AND MY BET IS HE WAS GOING TO SHOW THEM HERE-

LET'S CHECK OUT SOME OF THE PUBLISHERS.

GOOD IDEA, MAUSER- IT BEATS TRYING TO SPOT BILLY IN THIS MOB-

MICHAEL TREE? MIKE MAUSER? WHAT ARE MY FELLOW P.I.'S DOING AT A COMIC BOOK CONVENTION? OR DID I WANDER INTO THE R.E.N.M.A. ANNUAL MEETING?

WHY, THE PRIVATE EYES NAMED MICHAEL ASSOCIATION, OF COURSE, WHAT ELSE?

MIKE MIST. I SHOULD'VE KNOWN.

WHAT'S R.E.N.M.A.?

MIST, YOU'RE A COMIC BOOK COLLECTOR. EVER HEAR OF A COMICS CHARACTER CALLED THE WOMBAT?

CAN'T SAY AS I HAVE-BUT YOU MIGHT CHECK OUT SOME OF THESE NEW COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS THESE INDEPENDENT COMPANIES ARE COMING UP WITH...

Mickey Spillane's
MIKE HAMM
THE COMIC STAR

ELLIS

FLASH
COMICS

ATLANTIC COMICS

Mauer and I headed for the nearest booth, where editor Max Brass was reviewing the portfolios of dozens of Billy Freemans...



Brasz then told us about an eccentric, but very talented, young cartoonist in the city...

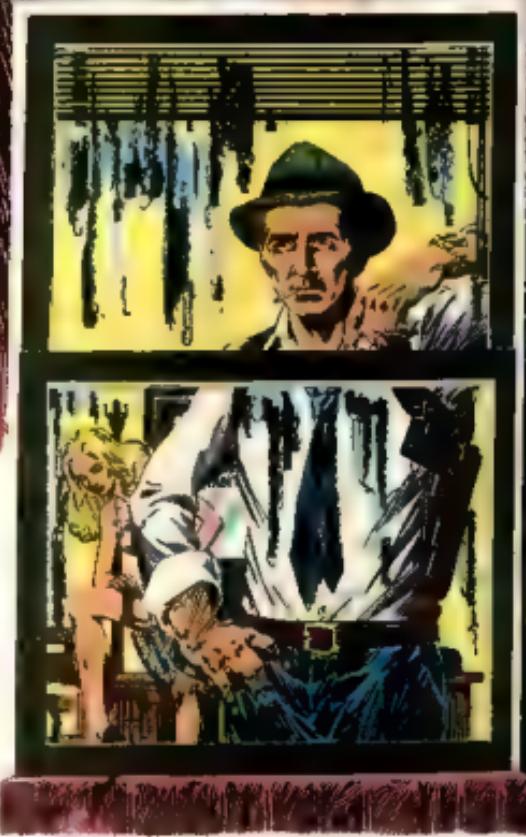


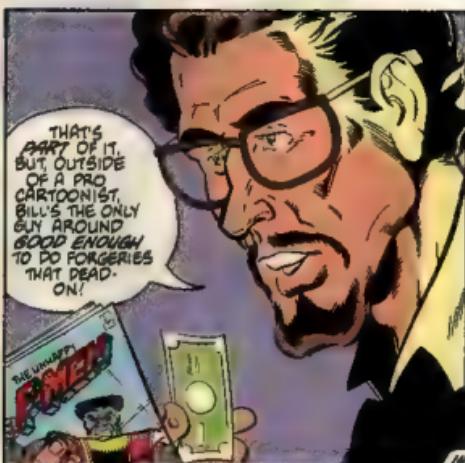
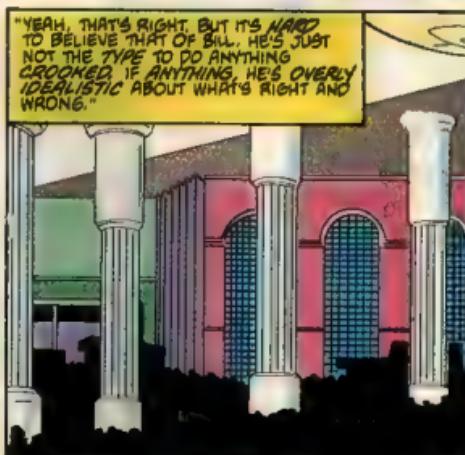
MICKEY SPILLANE'S MIKE HAMMER

Mike Hammer is a private detective in New York City, a city he loves and hates. He is the beautiful, mysterious Venus, a licensed P. private, and nearly as deadly as her been, to the love of his life. Hammer has a peculiar streak and compassion for life-savers, and his adventures are rarely paid cases but, rather, first him seeking justice for a wrong done a friend or acquaintance. Mike Hammer sets the laws of society at odds in his desire to ignore the commands of a higher morality and often appears himself judge, jury and executioner, amazingly.

Hammer's first appearance in *C. The Jury*, 1947, changed the face of the hardboiled mystery in ten more novels (from *My Gun Is Quick*, 1956, to *Service* — *Zest*, 1970). Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer has earned a reputation as the toughest — and sexiest — of all the media private eyes. With decades of radio, comic strip, movie and TV adaptations, Hammer continues to hold the "tough guy" crown to this day.

Based upon material in *One Gang Knight: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* by Max Allan Collins and James L. Trope, published by Popular Press, Bowling Green.











SO...
YOU KNOW ME!
I KNOW YOU, TOO,
THIEF!

"BUT I THINK YOU'RE
BETTER LOOKING IN A
SKI MASK!"

I
RECOGNIZE
YOUR VOICE
FROM THE KOSMIC
COMIC BOOK
SHOP THE
OTHER
NIGHT.

WELL, WOMBAT...I SEE YOU
CAUGHT UP WITH THE LAST
OF THE CROOKS. NICE
PIECE O' WORK, PAL...JUST
STEP ASIDE AND WE'LL
TAKE IT FROM
HERE.





VALER! THE THIRD THIEF FROM KOSMIC KOMICS JUST TOOK OFF THATAWAY! MAUSER AND I'LL TAKE CARE OF THE WOMBAT-

CHECK!





EMAN

MAUSER'S STORY

by NICOLA CUTI
JON STATION and
RICK BURCHETT

#24

ON SALE IN FEBRUARY

THE FIRST CHOICE KEEPS GETTING BETTER!

FIRST
COMICS

COUNT ON US.













WHAT
CRAZY BUSINESS
IS THAT?

COMICS.

THE END
To Don Thompson

ANOTHER
SCAN BY
CLEVELAND'S OWN...
GLITCH



YOU DOWN WITH DCP?